In this report, the NRU provides information about the factors related to supply, demand and utilization of nurses in Ontario. Outcomes of the report include a discussion of current issues likely to impact planning, production and management of nursing resources in the future.

**Health Demand Estimates**

- The population of Ontario increased by 7% between 1991 and 1996.
- Health policy makers are concerned with the growth of the elderly (>65 years) and very elderly (>75 years) populations which have increased 13% and 15% respectively between 1991 and 1996.
- Other areas of concern include an increase in low income and single parent families, child poverty rates (increase of 9.3% between 1989-1996) as well as persons living alone, factors associated with increased health system use.

**Per Capita Health Service Utilization**

- The number of acute and psychiatric hospital beds, discharges and inpatient days dropped between 1992 and 1996 at a rate of 23%, 17% and 24% respectively.
- While the number of hospital beds per capita has fallen, between 1992-1996 outpatient surgeries have increased by 9%, outpatient clinic visits have remained stable and emergency room visits have declined by 12%.
- In the same time frame, home care nursing visits increased 80%.
- Long term care patient needs are increasingly complex.

**Financial Resources and Utilization**

- Since 1993 however, the overall public health care spending has not kept pace with inflation, therefore real per capita expenditures on health care have been falling.
- At the same time, private health care expenditures have increased at a rate of 5% per annum.

**Nursing Resource Supply**

- The number of practicing RNs per 100,000 population dropped sharply, 9.8% from 775 in 1992 to 689 in 1997.
- During the period of 1994 to 1997 there was a 7% and 3.3% drop in the supply of RNs and RPNs respectively.
• Between 1993 and 1996, the number of diploma enrollments and graduates of both RN (-33% enrollments, -9% graduates) and RPN (-23% enrollments, -19% graduates) community college programs declined. The university programs experienced a moderate increase of 10.42% in graduates.

• In 1994 the number of nursing graduates peaked at 3,055
• Workforce participation rates amongst RNs and RPNs have remained stable at about 80%.
• More than half of the nurses under age 34 are seeking work in nursing.
• The number of part-time and casual positions has been climbing for both RNs and RPNs since 1992.
• 43% of nurses under the age of 30 are employed part-time or on a casual basis.
• Almost half of all working nurses in Ontario are over the age of 45.

**Nursing Resource Utilization**

• RNs and RPNs continue to be employed predominantly in hospitals with a slight increase in the numbers working in long-term and community care settings.
• Since 1994, the number of paid nursing hours has increased in both teaching and non-teaching hospitals. At the same time, the number of paid support hours (e.g., housekeeping) and nursing management support positions has decreased.
• The overall volume of services in the home care sector has increased since 1990, unfortunately, current data makes it difficult to determine who has been responsible for providing the increased level of services. Nursing services, for instance, have increased by 80%, but the number of RNs and RPNs employed in this sector has increased insignificantly by 3%.

**Planning, Production and Management for the Future** (Hall, 1988)

How can we determine how many and what type of nurses will be needed to meet demands of the future?

**Planning:** Trends in population growth, health service utilization and changes to health care expenditures will require a macro view of health and the health care system to ensure that adequate resources are available to meet changing demands/needs which includes planning for nursing resources in all areas of the system (e.g., public health, primary health care).

**Production:** Decreases in the number of enrollments and nursing program graduates require concerted attention, especially in light of the large number of nurses likely to retire within the next five to fifteen years. Effective decisions about the production of nursing personnel will work to ensure that an adequate number of skilled graduates with appropriate knowledge are available for the future.

**Management:** Strategies for the management of nursing personnel will have to respond to issues of working conditions for nurses in all sectors of the health care system. Restructuring has impacted the deployment and work status of nurses. Management decisions can influence morale, productivity and stability within the nursing workforce, and these key factors impact important considerations of client care. O’Brien-Pallas et al. (1998) indicate has “how we manage human resources is as important as knowing how many we need and how many to produce”.

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References
A Review of “Health Human Resources: A Preliminary Analysis of Nursing Personnel in Ontario”, a recent report by the Nursing Effectiveness, Utilization and Outcomes Research Unit